

Common Folk Oral History Collection
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Location of Interview: Panam [Tib. pa snam], Tibet Autonomous Region, China

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Interviewed by: Melvyn Goldstein and Ben Jiao

Name: Dagnyer [Tib. bdag gnyer]

Gender: Male

Age: 59

Date of Birth: 1941

Abstract

The subject was a treba villager from Chugong in Dūjung Dzong. In this interview, he talks about being sent to join the Gadang Regiment of the Tibetan Army at age sixteen to fulfill a corvée tax obligation. He discusses his life there in detail. After the revolt failed in March 1959, he discusses how his Shigatse Regiment surrendered, and how he was arrested and sent to a "reform through labor" camp in Ngachen to work on constructing the power station there, as well as about life in Ngachen. He was also talks about how he was selected to join the People's Liberation Army and discusses how he fought with the People's Liberation Army, and how his unit chased Chushigandru guerrillas who had fled to western Tibet.

Tape 1

Q: In the beginning you were from Chugong [Tib. chu gong], right?

A: Yes.

Q: How did you come to leave there?

A: We had one gang of land for which we were obligated to send a man to serve as a soldier in the Gadang or Third Regiment [Tib. ga dang dmag sgar] in Shigatse. For each gang of land a family held, they had to send one soldier. The soldier who had been hired by Chugong to serve for them had died and I was sent to become a soldier as his substitute. At that point, I was 16 years old.

Q: Who was your lord [Tib. dpon po]?

A: My main lord was the Tibetan Government. We were under Dūjung Dzong.

Q: You were a treba household, right?

A: Yes.

Q: How much land did you have?

A: We had one gang of land. Probably, that was equal to today's 20 mu.

Q: Is a mu equal to a khe?

A: A mu is a little bit smaller than a khe.

Q: How many khe of seeds did you plant?

A: We planted about 16 khe of seeds.

Q: What was the name of the dzongpön of Dujüing?

A: When I became a soldier, the dzongpön was named Champa Chömpel [Tib. byams pa chos 'phel].

Q: What did you think about going? Were you happy or were you angry? And why did they send you instead of sending your elder brother?

A: There were a lot of elderly people at home and my elder brother was more capable with respect to work for our corvée taxes, and taking care of fields and the elderly people. I was the younger one, so they sent me.

Q: What did you think about going?

A: I was afraid somebody would beat me up. Otherwise, I didn't have any thoughts because I was young.

Q: At the time of your departure, what did your family give you?

A: They gave me some clothing and enough food for a month. After that, they said they would send me food periodically.

Q: Did you ride a horse when you went?

A: Yes, I rode a horse that had a small bell hung on its neck.

Q: You didn't have a gun, right?

A: They said the gun would be given after arriving at the regiment.

Q: Was there a time limit for serving as a soldier? Was it going to be for 3 years or more?

A: One became a soldier for one's entire life.

Q: Was it allowed to change the person serving?

A: When they wanted to change people, they had to bribe the person in charge.

Q: Who was the person to be bribed?

A: Those were the depön, the rupön and the gyagpön.

Q: When you left, where did you go?

A: I went to Shigatse. The regiment was located at the place called the Pangjalgong [Tib. pang gcal gong]. It was the Gadang Regiment [Tib. ga dang dmag sgar].

Q: When you arrived at the regiment, how did they receive you?

A: In the beginning I had to go in person before each of the rupön and the gyagpön to show them what I looked like. And I had to request that they accept me as a soldier. At that point, I had to offer them a khata scarf, some eggs, butter and meat. The rupön was the fourth rupön and there were three gyagpön present named Tobgye [Tib. stobs rgyas], Migmar Tsering [Tib. mig dmar tshe ring], and Namang [Tib. na mang ?]. After getting their bribes/gifts, those leaders nodded their heads, implying that I was accepted. However, there was a Gyagpön called Dagyal [Tib. zla rgyal] who was from Panam Gyangpen [Tib. pa snam rgyang 'phen] who said to me, "Can this boy who looks like a mouse serve as a soldier for one gang of land given by the government? You are not accepted, get out!"

So I went back and took some more butter and meat and made the request again to him. He then said, "Come to the office where the leaders are assembled and we will consult about that."

At that point, I put some wool in my boots so that I would look a little bit taller. I went to the office and when I entered the office Gyagpön Dagyal told the Rupön, "What do you think about this boy?" The Rupön was more powerful than the Gyagpön and said, "This boy is quite pleasant looking [Tib. phra rgyas bzang po], so I suggest we accept him." And then they gave me the lagthe, which was like a bracelet made from cotton on which a seal was put on [with] wax. We had to cover the seal on the bracelet with a piece of glass and sew it on with thread. We had to keep it carefully. If it was lost, one would not be regarded as a soldier. After that, they discussed whether to send me to become a trumpeter or to practice drills. They decided to send me to practice military drills.

Q: What did the trumpeter have to do?

A: They had to blow the trumpet at the time of getting up, going to sleep and so on.

Q: Did you feel glad when you got the lagthe?

A: At that time I was young, so I didn't have any special kind of feelings.

Q: What did you think about them sending you to practice drills?

A: They gave me a 303 English Carbine with a bayonet. It was about one tho taller than my height. That kind of gun had two bayonets, a shorter one and a longer one.

Q: At that point, could you carry the gun?

A: Yes. I could barely carry the gun. From the next day on I was taken to the field behind the dzong to practice drills. The drill language was all in English and we were taught to say "left," "right," [in English] when we marched. We didn't know the language, so when we make mistakes between right and left, the teacher pulled our ears and said, "Isn't this left?" Later, these commands were translated into Tibetan, and we were taught to say "left" in Tibetan, "yön [Tib. g.yon]" and "right" in Tibetan as "ye [Tib. g.yas]." A group from the Dalai Lama's Gusung Regiment came to Shigatse and they were using the Tibetan language terms in the drills.

Q: How many soldiers were there with you?

A: I was in a squad.

Q: Where were the soldiers in your squad from?

A: They were from Tö, Rong [Tib. rong], Panam [Tib. pa snam] and other places.

Q: Were those soldiers older than you?

A: They were all old soldiers.

Q: How old were the soldiers in your squad?

A: The older soldiers were in their 50s and 40s. I had to become a soldier when I was very young because the former soldier died. Those old soldiers had fought wars in Kham when the Chinese first came to Tibet.

Q: You were the smallest, therefore did the old soldiers insult you?

A: Being a new soldier, I had to serve them a pot of chang which was called "New (Arrival) Chang" [Tib. gsar chang].

Q: You had to serve the chang to all the 10 soldiers, right?

A: Yes. I also had to sing a song for each of the soldiers when I was serving them chang. If I didn't know songs, I had to crow like a rooster and bray like a donkey.

Q: Who was the leader of the squad?

A: There was a shengo and a jugpön.

Q: Did the leaders insult you, or how did they treat you?

A: The leaders in our squad did not insult me. But when I was sort of show-offish and passing by, the older soldiers in other squads said to me, "These boys are showing off. " At that point, I would bend my head down and stick out my tongue to show a kind of respect to them.

Q: Did the soldiers live in one room?

A: Yes. We were living in one room.

Q: How did you eat food?

A: We would pool our tea leaves, salt and the other stuffs we need for making porridge and tea. But we would each eat our own tsamba.

Q: Did you have to stay in the regiment all the time, or could you sometimes go to Shigatse?

A: With the exception of when we practiced the drills and did the evening prayer to Tara [Tib. droma], during the midday we were free to go wherever we wanted. We would go to the market and the chang bars. Nobody would say anything. However, if we were not present in the morning at the drill and at the Tara Prayers in the evening, they would beat us.

Q: Did you get beaten?

A: Once I was beaten because I was late for the Tara Prayer.

Q: How did they beat you?

A: There were two whips hanging at the head of the seat. Once, when I was late for the prayers, the Gyagpön Dagyal came over holding the whip and he just hit me twice with the handle of the whip. He didn't whip me. If somebody didn't obey their order, they would be whipped with at most 100 hits. When they were whipping people, one person would hold the head and one person would pull the legs with a rope. After taking off the person's trousers, they would make the person turn face down. Then two people would whip from both sides alternately on the buttocks and thigh. At the beginning, their flesh would become whitish, then it would get bruised. After that when the whip hit the bruise, it would bleed.

Q: Usually for what kind of reasons would they whip people?

A: They would whip people who were fighting with each other, stealing things and hunting blue sheep, which was prohibited at that time. Once, three soldiers went to Lho Shelkar [Tib. lho shel dkar] Monastery. There they saw some blue sheep going around the monastery. The blue sheep were not afraid of people and the soldiers killed some of these blue sheep. After that, those

soldiers were whipped.

Q: How many times were they whipped?

A: Each of them was whipped 100 lashes.

Q: After they were whipped, probably they couldn't walk?

A: They were sort of walking. Their bones and muscles were not hurt, only their flesh was hurt.

Q: Did they yell when they were whipped?

A: Yes, they were yelling, "A tsha (ouch)! Please have mercy on me! [Tib. thugs rjes gzigs])." When they were doing the whipping, both of the whippers would alternatively count the number of strikes out loud as they were whipping.

Q: While they were whipping, was there any difference how severely they would whip? Was there any way of finding people who knew them, and tell them not to whip them severely?

A: When the tip of the whip hit on the ground, there would not be much pain. When the tip hit on the flesh, then it would be very painful.

Q: If the person being whipped was their friend, they would hit the tip of the whip on the ground. If not, they would hit on their flesh, right?

A: Yes, two shengo would whip the soldiers. If the soldier was going to be expelled from the regiment, then the trumpeters would whip and expel him.

Q: How many trumpeters would whip the soldier?

A: Two trumpeters would be told to whip him.

Q: Usually, for what kind of reasons would a soldier be expelled?

A: Soldiers who had committed the crime of murder, or the soldiers who didn't abide by the rules of the regiment and were recklessly wandering outside instead of staying in the regiment. Those soldiers would be expelled.

Q: After those soldiers were expelled, would a substitute be gotten?

A: After the soldier was expelled, the household who had been obliged to send the soldier had to send a soldier in his place.

Q: At that point, did you get any salary?

A: Yes. We got 100 sang, one brick of tea and 12 khe of barley per year.

Q: What did you do when you were practicing drills?

A: In the beginning, when I would make some mistakes, they would pull my ears. But later I became a little bit smarter. So when they were coming to pull my ear on the right side, I would turn my head to the right side immediately so it wouldn't hurt much. At the age of 18, Tibet was liberated by force. I had been in the army for two years

Q: Did you visit your home during that time?

A: I visited my home once as a vacation.

Q: How long?

A: For 7 days.

Q: At that point, were you happy at home?

A: I was very glad because I met my late father and my grandmothers.

Q: When you visited your home, what was the viewpoint of the masses living near by? Did they sort of admire and like you?

A: Yes. They were saying that we were Tibetan soldiers and they regarded us highly. Furthermore, I became a soldier at such a young age that I was regarded as very famous.

Q: When you went to the village, did you wear your uniform?

A: Usually, we could wear whatever chupa we had. At the time of marching in formation, we would wear the khaki woolen chupa dress with yellow stripes [Tib. ser khra] on the collar and khaki trousers. The woolen cloth for the chupa was bought by the soldiers themselves and was dyed in the regiment. Usually, the regiment would collect the uniforms. On special kinds of ceremonies, like the military drill on the 3rd [Tib. tshes gsum thog mda'], they would hand out the uniforms to the soldiers.

Q: Usually, did you carry your gun when you went outside?

A: No. We had to leave the guns in the regiment.

Q: Usually, what did you do during your spare time?

A: I would just wander around the market. I didn't have any work.

Q: Were you allowed to stay overnight outside?

A: After the sleeping bugle was blown, we were not allowed to stay outside. In the regiment there were two houses. One for the depön, rupön and the gyagpön, and one for the office. Situated around that there were many rooms in which the squads lived. Then in March 1959, the revolt took place. The day before the revolt was going to take place, the People's Liberation Army soldiers were making bunkers with bags of sands that were facing towards us. I was wondering why they were doing that because we didn't know anything about what was going on.

Q: Previously, did you have any relations with the People's Liberation Army?

A: No. We didn't have any relations with them.

Q: They didn't come to your regiment, right?

A: They didn't come to our regiment and we didn't go to their place.

Q: Did you see the People's Liberation Army troops?

A: Yes.

Q: What did you say to each other when you saw the People's Liberation Army wearing their uniforms and carrying their guns?

A: At that point we were saying these "Chinese Corpses [Tib. rgya ro]) have come to the territory of Tibet." We would feel sort of angry.

Q: Did you do something to start a fight, like tease them when you saw them?

A: No, we didn't do anything like that. And they were not doing anything to start a fight. Therefore, we were wondering what they were going to do when they made those bunkers of theirs. The next day, the Depön and the Gyagpön [answer not finished].

Q: Who was the depön?

A: He was Karchungwa [Tib. dkar byung ba]. He was from Gyantse. The next morning, the Chinese invited the Depön and the Gyagpön to Tashi Gyentsal [Tib. bkra shis skyed tshal] [] for a party. The Chinese told them that they had already erected their flag on the Potala Palace and that they had taken over Lhasa. "Now are you going to surrender or not?" They were seized in that place like that. That evening, the Fourth Rupön was in the regiment, so he called the soldiers for the Tara Prayer. The Depön came there with one People's Liberation Army soldier at the front and another soldier behind him. Another Tibetan who was wearing a blue suit also came.

Q: Was he a cadre or an interpreter?

A: Probably, he was an interpreter. At first, the Depön went to his house with the soldiers. At that point, we were talking to each other asking what was going on. Then the Depön told us, "In the area near the Chushar [Tib. chu shar] Bridge, the Khambas are robbing many things from the misers. Therefore, our regiment and the People's Liberation Army soldiers in Tashi Gyentsal are going to fight against them. You don't need to carry your guns, as you will be given guns from Tashi Gyentsal. So stop doing the Tara prayer and all of you have to come with me." After that, we were taken to the field called Jiaotang [Ch. jiao wu chang] where military drills were practiced. We were standing in line and at that point, and the People's Liberation Army soldiers were pointing their guns towards us from all the directions. I thought that now it was finished.

Q: What did you think when you were taken down all of a sudden?

A: I was wondering what was going to happen and why he was saying that we didn't need to take our guns?

Q: Did you believe him, when he said that the Khambas were robbing things?

A: I didn't have much belief in what he said.

Q: At that point, what did the other soldiers say?

A: The other soldiers were saying, "The Depön is saying that the Khambas are robbing things and we don't need to take our guns, and that guns will be given from Tashi Gyentsal, but that doesn't sound good." So one or two soldiers ran away at that time because at that point there were no People's Liberation Army soldiers coming behind us.

Q: Had you heard anything about what happened in Lhasa?

A: We hadn't heard anything. In the beginning, we were standing in three lines. After that, the lines were made broader and the People's Liberation Army soldiers came between the lines and searched all of our bullets and small knives. Then we were told to sit down.

There was an interpreter who was from Shang Namling [Tib. shangs nam gling]. He said, "From today on, the Tibetan government is overthrown. The Tibetan government does not exist. Yesterday, we took over Lhasa and we erected our flag on the Potala Palace. The Tibetans lost the war. Today we erected the flag on the Shigatse Jidzong [Tib. spyi rdzong]. It was good that you surrendered, because if you didn't surrender, all of you would have been killed. Now you are under the leadership of the Communist Party. The Local Tibetan Government has been completely destroyed."

Q: At that point, what did you think?

A: I didn't have any kind of special feeling because I was very young. But the elderly soldiers were saying, "Now, it's finished! We have been receiving salary from the Tibetan government and it is too bad that we were not able to serve the government." They were also saying that probably, it was not true that Lhasa was lost." Then we were taken to a place where the People's Liberation Army used to live.

Q: Before that, did you hear about Chushigandru fighting with the Chinese?

A: We didn't hear anything about that. The Tibetan soldiers didn't have telephones and those things. So we didn't hear any kind of news. We could only hear something from people coming from other places. Also we didn't have any vehicles to travel to Lhasa. Only the People's Liberation Army had vehicles. The Tibetan government had a few vehicles, but they would not give us a ride. So we had to travel on horseback.

Q: What did you think when the PLA were in Shigatse and you were saying some derogatory terms to them, did you think that situation would last forever? Did you think that the People's Liberation Army would go back?

A: At that point, the People's Liberation Army soldiers were like small boys, so the elderly soldiers were saying that there would be no problem in handling them. At that point, I also thought that those People's Liberation Army soldiers could be expelled by making a kind of war against them.

Q: Did you think that such a great change would take place?

A: No, at that time, the Tibetan Government and the Labrang [Tashilhunpo] were not getting along well. The Dalai Lama was over there, and the Panchen Lama was living here. The bodyguards of the Panchen Lama were Tibetans, but the State gave them the uniforms, and the weapons and salary. Therefore, I was thinking that in case the Tibetan government and the People's Liberation Army would make war, Labrang would probably support the People's Liberation Army. The two Lamas were getting along quite well, but the people under their leadership who held the political power were not getting along well.

Q: Did you ever have any difficulties with the soldiers of Labrang? Did you ever fight with them?

A: No, we didn't have any contradictions with them, and we didn't fight with them. There were only 500 bodyguards troops of the Panchen Lama.

Q: How many soldiers did you have in your regiment?

A: In our Gadang regiment there were a little more than 1,000 soldiers. Among the 1,000 soldiers, there was one battalion [a unit of 500 soldiers] who were from the places that belonged to Labrang.

Q: Were those soldiers together with you?

A: Yes, we were in one regiment. Only the places from which they were recruited was different. But the Panchen Lama himself had only his own bodyguard troops.

At that point, the Tibetan government possessed the Second or Trapchi Regiment [Tib. kha dang dmag sgar], the Third or Gadang Regiment and the Police Regiment [Tib. rgyal rtse dmag sgar], which is as same as the Military Police [Tib. drag chas yen rtog pa].

Q: What did they do when you were captured?

A: In the evening, they threw out enamel covered mugs for each person from a window. After that we were given a bucket of black tea without salt and a bag of tsamba. There were guards at the gate and on the roof. We didn't have any chance to move around. We didn't have anything. We didn't even have any bedding. That night we had to sleep on a table made just out of bricks without any bedding.

Q: You didn't have cushions, right?

A: We didn't have anything. The next day, the People's Liberation Army took 5-6 of us to our regiment [building] to collect our clothes and bedding. The People's Liberation Army were carrying guns and coming with us. After that, they let us do some study [answer not finished].

Q: Didn't you think about running away?

A: I thought I would not be able to run away, so I didn't think about running way.

Q: Did anybody run away?

A: Three soldiers ran away through the hole in the toilet. They jumped into the toilet hole when they went to urinate. Later, they were caught and brought back.

Q: What did they do with them?

A: As a punishment, they let them clean the toilet. They didn't beat them up.

Q: How long did they keep you going to the study sessions?

A: For about a week.

Q: What did they say at that point?

A: They were telling us, "The policy of the Communist Party is very good and is for overthrowing the three feudal lords who have been exploiting and suppressing the people. And the policy of the Party is to allowing the laboring people to stand up. You should believe in this policy. Under the leadership of Chairman Mao, the people in the entire country have been liberated. All of the people who were liberated have stood up, and they voluntarily are loving and respecting the Communist Party and following the Communist Party. You also have to do the same".

Q: Did they say that the Dalai Lama had fled to India?

A: They said that the Dalai Lama was taken [there]. They betrayed the motherland, and stirred up the revolt and fled abroad into exile. So they didn't have any future. If the [Dalai Lama] had stayed in Tibet, he could have worked for the Buddhism in Tibet. But they didn't implement the principles of the 17-Point Agreement and stirred up the revolt.

If they had implemented the Agreement, the estates, the lands, and the agricultural implements that belonged to the kudrak would have been given to the misers and the kudrak would have gotten a salary from the State. But they didn't accept the Agreement and stirred up the revolt.

Q: What did you think about that?

A: At that point, the People's Liberation Army soldiers didn't beat us. They were sort of going through the motions of treating us kindly so I thought, they might be really good.

Q: What else did you think at that point?

A: I was afraid that they might make me work very hard, and if they did that and I was not be able to work so hard, I was afraid of being beaten. But afterwards, they didn't beat me. There was a military officer in Tashi Gyentsal, now I learned that he was probably the commander [Ch. shi zhang] of the 53rd Division. He told me, "Now you are young so you should become a People's Liberation Army soldier."

Q: Did he take you alone and tell you that?

A: Yes, he took me alone and told me about that. But I told him that I was not going to become a People's Liberation Army soldier. I was afraid.

Q: Why did you refuse that?

A: It was because I thought that I might have to go with the Chinese and I didn't know the Chinese language. He told me to do that three times, but I refused. He told me that I have to think about that carefully. Otherwise he didn't say anything. After that we were made to study in the morning and work on an irrigation canal in the afternoon for about a month.

Q: Was the work hard?

A: The work was not so hard, but I had to work like the other people and there were soldiers coming after us. And they had put machine guns on the higher places and we were working with the machine guns pointed towards us. I was not afraid that they would shoot us, because it had been a few days since we were arrested. After that, we were sent to Lhasa, to build the Ngachen [Tib. nga chen] Power Station.

Q: Were you taken in vehicles?

A: Yes, a truck full of People's Liberation Army soldiers was following a truck full of Tibetan soldiers.

Q: During that time, did you think or worry about what was happening in the village and to your family?

A: My elder brother had come to see me.

Q: Was that during your stay in Shigatse for a month?

A: We were allowed to meet family members.

Q: What did he say?

A: He told me that it was too bad I was arrested, "But do not do any reckless things like running away, because if you do that, the Chinese will kill you. You should bare the hardship and work hard." Before my brother left he was crying.

Q: Did he tell you something about your family?

A: Yes, he said that my family members were well. And I sent back some clothes that I didn't need.

Q: Did he tell you about the village?

A: He didn't say anything about the village. Probably because at that point the Work Teams had not been sent to the villages. When we were in Ngachen, there were many monks from Sera and Drepung Monasteries.

Q: When they took you in the truck, did they tell you that you were going to build the Ngachen Power Station?

A: Yes.

Q: Had you been to Lhasa before?

A: I had never been to Lhasa.

Q: What did you think at that point?

A: I was wondering what Lhasa looked like. They didn't let us stay in Lhasa. They took us up there to Ngachen where there were many Tibetan soldiers. And there were many People's Liberation Army soldiers keeping watch over us. Our tents were surrounded by barbed wires. There were 10 people in each tent. At that point, we were told that the barbed wires were electrified and if we touched it, we would get an electric shock. But I am not sure whether they actually conducted electricity or not.

The work was very hard every day. We had to carry a basket full of pebbles every day. That was for building the pond of the power station where people had to carry pebbles in baskets on the dam, and they were pressing the dam down with a tractor. At that point I had sores on my back after working for a week. In the beginning, it hurt very severely. Later I got sort of used to it.

There was a platoon leader [Ch. pai zhang] who was from (Inner) Mongolia. In each unit of 100 there were 3-4 People's Liberation Army leaders with an interpreter. One day the leader told me, "If you have to carry baskets every day, your body will get spoiled. What do you think about becoming our messenger?" I asked him what I would have to do as a messenger [Ch. tong xin yuan]? He said, "You have to deliver messages and you have to serve boiled water when we hold meetings. And you have to wash our clothes." I was very glad to hear that.

Q: Was that the leader from Mongolia?

A: Yes, he was Payila.

Q: Was he a People's Liberation Army soldier?

A: Yes.

Q: When you met fellow Tibetan soldiers, did you talk about Chushigandru and about the war in Lhasa?

A: They were talking about the war in Lhasa, but they didn't know about Chushigandru.

Q: What did they say about the war in Lhasa?

A: They said, "In the beginning, the Dalai Lama was invited to the Chinese regiment. At that point, the Khambas and the people of Lhasa shouted that they were not going to let the Dalai Lama go to the Chinese Military Headquarters. At that point, the person who came to invite the Dalai Lama was Phagpalha [Tib. 'phags pa lha] Khenjung. The Khambas and the masses stabbed and beat him up. They told him that they were not going to let him go down, and they said that he was a Chinese collaborator. They heard that he was not hurt with a knife but an old woman stoned him on his head and he was bleeding. Then they stabbed him and cut off his head, and took his head and his hands around the Barkor Street. The next day, the fighting took place. When they were remaining calm, artillery was fired from all directions. They didn't get a chance to shoot back. When they were firing artillery at the Potala Palace, the shell didn't explode on the Palace. The shells exploded after falling down. After that, the soldiers were seized. Just a few were able to run away.

Q: Were you very religious at that time?

A: I sort of had faith in religion.

Q: Was your faith strong?

A: I was young, so I was just believing in what the elderly people were saying about the religion.

Q: When you were working in Ngachen, did they pay you wages?

A: We didn't get wages because it was said that we had to reform ourselves through labor. But they gave us food. After that, I was taken out from the place surrounded with barbed wire and brought where the leaders were living. I served them by washing their clothes, serving them boiled water [to drink] when they were holding meetings, and delivering messages.

After working for a while, they said that from among the young people, about 10 people who were in better physical health have to join the People's Liberation Army and they asked us whether we wanted to join the army voluntarily? There were about 100 volunteers among us. One day, a military officer came over and had all of us line up. He looked at all the people and choose 11 men. I was among the 11 men.

Q: At that time, did you say that you were going to join the People's Liberation Army?

A: Yes.

Q: What was your reason for that?

A: Because we had been educated that the policy of the Communist Party is good and the People's Liberation Army is an Army for serving the people and that they should work for the people. Also there is no difference between the military officers and the soldiers. So I thought that there would be nobody beating me up, and I wanted to carry a gun and become a People's Liberation Army soldier.

Q: Before that, did you think that the feudal system was bad and about the poor livelihood of the masses?

A: I heard the propaganda of the Chinese saying that the Tibetan Government had very bad prisons, and that they were whipping the people, putting canes on their necks, putting wax on the buttocks and hanging people upside down. Although I had never seen those things, I thought that the Tibetan Government policies were bad. Under the policy of the Communist Party, even if someone made an error, if they confessed, the policy was lenient. If they didn't confess, it was said there would be severe punishment. In the old society, regardless of confessing or not, when people were fighting each other, the more a person would bribe the person in charge, the more victory was likely. Even if the justice was on the poor person's side, they would suffer the loss. I thought that was bad. The officers of the People's Liberation Army were not beating and abusing people, I thought that was good.

Q: Did you have that kind of thought before the year 1959?

A: Before that, I didn't have that kind of thought. We were different nationalities and I didn't know about the policy and how they were implementing it. After hearing the propaganda regarding the policy of the Communist Party and about the old society, I thought there was a difference between the two systems.

Q: When you got selected, did you feel glad?

A: I was glad. After that they said that they had to give me a physical exam. At that point, I thought I may not qualify. Among the 11 people only one person was not qualified. He was from Norbu Khyungtse [Tib. nor bu khyung rtse] village. That night, we were told to stay in the regiment. They gave us some old clothes and bedding. The next day, we were brought to the storeroom of the regiment.

Q: At that point, there were no soldiers coming behind you, right?

A: No, then we were brought to the storeroom of the regiment. And we were told to wear the uniform according to one's size. And we were given bedding and the rope for tying the bedding. And they said that from today on, I was a People's Liberation Army soldier. Our squad leaders were two Chinese.

Q: Was that in the year 1959 or 60?

A: That was in September of 1959.

Q: How old were you then?

A: I was 18 years old. At that time, they didn't give us a gun. We were just working on the vegetable garden for a week or so. After that, we were sent to Lhoka. At that point, they were still having some fighting with the Khambas. We were sent to the regiments who were fighting with the Khambas. We were sent to the place called Talung [Tib. stag lung], which was located near Tsöna and Drigu [Tib. gri gu]. We stayed in Talung for a month.

Q: What did you do?

A: We were just getting some training and helping the misers to sweep their floor and working for them. At that point, they didn't give us guns.

Q: Mainly, were they making relations between the People's Liberation Army and the masses?

A: There were 5-6 prisoners who were known to be the heads of that place. We were told to practice Tibetan dances with them. They were going through the motions of teaching us dancing and we were dancing with them.

Q: Was the dance supposed to be shown to the masses?

A: It was supposed to be shown at the Talung Trade Fair [Tib. tshong 'dus].

Q: You were supposed to dance on behalf of the People's Liberation Army soldiers, right?

A: Yes, we were wearing Tibetan chupa when we were dancing.

Q: How were your relations with the people of Talung?

A: Our relations became quite close. When I told them that I was a Tibetan soldier and that now I have become a People's Liberation Army soldier, the misers were saying, "A Tibetan soldier became a People's Liberation Army soldier. That is very good." After staying one month in Talung, we were sent to Chongye [Tib. 'phyong rgyas] where we received some training for

making war.

Q: Didn't they give you a gun?

A: They gave us guns and the insignias. Before that, we only had a uniform without the insignias.

Q: How was your training different from that when you were a Tibetan soldier?

A: Comparing it to the training of the People's Liberation Army, the Tibetan soldiers were really idiots [Tib. lkugs pa]. The Tibetans were only taught how to march, they didn't teach us how to make war and how to shoot guns. The People's Liberation Army were training us how to crawl on the ground, how to run, and how to find a place to shoot and defend oneself. At that time, the Tibetan soldiers were unable to make war because they didn't get any kind of training. If they could shoot the gun accurately, that would be the best, otherwise they didn't know how to hide.

Q: In your squad were there any other Tibetan soldiers?

A: There was only one Tibetan in each squad. The rest were Chinese.

Q: How did you communicate with them?

A: In the beginning, I learned Chinese, starting from the names of the foods. At the very beginning I had to use sign language. When I used sign language, they would speak the Chinese words, which I was able to keep in my mind.

Q: Did they insult you?

A: No, they didn't. Instead of that, they were saying that I was a minority nationality and I was treated better. When the soldiers were fighting with each other, the gyagpön would yell at the Chinese soldiers, but they did not yell at us. Instead of that, they gave advice, saying "The Chinese and the Tibetans are from the same nationality and you should unite [Tib. mthun sgril] together. You should not look down on each other. The Chinese should not regard the Tibetans as bad people. Similarly, the Tibetans should not regard the Chinese as bad people. We all are same." At that time, the Chinese were calling the Tibetans, "Tibetan idiots" [Ch. lao zang min].

Q: Did you know Tibetan writing?

A: Yes, I knew a little bit.

Q: How did you learn that?

A: I was taught Tibetan reading and writing when I was a Tibetan soldier.

Q: How did they teach you?

A: There was a teacher in the regiment. The younger soldiers were gathered together and we were taught Tibetan.

Q: Did the Chinese teach you Chinese characters?

A: Yes, but I couldn't understand it. I was thinking that I would not be able to learn characters, because that was very complicated. So I didn't even try to learn that.

Q: Did you hear anything from your family and the village?

A: At that point, I didn't hear anything from my family.

Q: Were you worried about your family?

A: I was worried about whether they were healthy or not.

Q: Were you worried about whether their fields might have [been] taken away?

A: When I saw the reforms taking place in Lhoka, I thought that they might also have the same situation.

Q: In Sogang [Tib. bsod sgang] village, was your family regarded as a rich family?

A: The regiment was asking me what was the class rank of my family? When I told them I don't know what class rank means, they were showing their fingers and asked me whether my family was the best, the middle, or the worse. Then I pointed to my middle finger. They were asking me, how many houses, fields and animals I had. And how many family members I had. When I told them the numbers. They said that it was appropriate to say that I was from the middle class.

Q: At that point, did you think that there would be problem [regarding class]?

A: They probably were saying that I was middle class. Some rich families suffered from the struggle sessions during the reforms. Therefore, I was worried that my family might have had the same treatment. If they would be treated like that, I was afraid that I might get expelled from the Army. Later, I heard that my family was categorized as middle class.

Q: Did the soldiers tell you that?

A: I received a letter from home saying that they were middle class. Before that, I sent a letter to them saying that "I am a People's Liberation Army soldier. I am very happy and the leaders are not beating us up. The policy of the Party is correct. You should obey whatever the Party tells you. And you should get united with the masses." They wrote in their letter that I did not need to worry about them. Our family was categorized as middle class. In the village they were holding struggle sessions against the ngadag and ngatsab.

Q: Did your family tell you to come back home?

A: No, they didn't.

Q: How long did you stay in Chongye?

A: I didn't stay in Chongye for a long time. In 1960 I was sent to Western Tibet [Tö]. At that time, in the Tö area, the reforms had not been implemented.

Our regiment was infantry, but in the regiment there was a cavalry unit of 100. I was among the cavalry. From Chongye, we went to Lhasa. In the Military Headquarters [Ch. jun qu] in Lhasa, we were given instructions regarding the situation of the reactionaries and how to make war against them. The leaders said the duty was hard and glorious, and we should accomplish our duty. In the evening they showed a movie. The next day we traveled from Lhasa on horseback up to Shigatse. From Shigatse, the horses were loaded in trucks.

Q: Which part of Tö did you go [to]?

A: At first we were sent to Ngamring [Tib. ngam ring] County, then we went to Sangsang [Tib. bzang bzang]. From that place we crossed a mountain pass and came to Shagchukha [Tib. shag chu kha]. It was said that that place belonged to a fourth rank [Tib. rim bzhi] official of Labrang [Tashilhunpo]. After that we came to Saga [Tib. sa dga'] County, and Menthong [Tib. sman khong] and Yanchö Tengkar [Tib. yan chos steng mkhar].

Q: Did you fight?

A: We just fought a little bit. Nobody was attacking us severely. Those probably were Chushigandru Khambas, like Andrutsang [Tib. a 'brug tshang] and those people who had fled to that place. There were just some small groups of bandits. There were not any large groups with many people. I heard that they were fleeing while imposing taxes on the nomads and taking some nomads with them. They also told the nomads that the Chinese were applying oil on the heads of the elderly, and hanging bells on their necks and making them eat grass on the mountains. And some of the young people were killed by the Chinese and some of the Chinese ate human flesh.

Therefore, the nomads were very afraid of the Chinese and they ran away. There were just a few nomads who stayed. When we came there, they were so scared that they were trembling. When we told them, "You should not believe in the rumors. We are People's Liberation Army soldiers serving the people and we are working for the people." But they still didn't believe us. The nomads were so scared that when we entered their tent, they would go out. And when we would go out, they would go in the tent. At that time, I was able to interpret language for daily use.

Q: Were the nomads surprised to hear that you spoke Chinese and Tibetan?

A: I told them that "I am a Tibetan and I came here to work for the Tibetan people." Then they trusted us. The Chinese didn't know Tibetan, so they believed that I was a Tibetan.

Q: When the People's Liberation Army was teaching about their policies, who were the interpreters?

A: There were many Tibetan soldiers who had graduated from China. I heard that when Tibet was liberated they sent 500 students to China. Those soldiers were also teaching us the Chinese language. It was easy to learn Chinese from them because they spoke both Chinese and Tibetan.

Q: Where did you have the first fight?

A: The first battle was made in Sashikha [Tib. ?]. There were 10 Khamba men and 7 women and three children. We had only a unit of 100 because all the soldiers were scattered. They [Khambas] were shooting from the monastery. The People's Liberation Army soldiers were charging forward while shooting guns. When we came near to the monastery, they ran away on to the mountain. Some of them ran away and some of them were seized. Only two women were shot dead.

Q: Did the women shoot guns?

A: No, the men were shooting. At that point, we seized 5 people. Our regiment took the five of them with us and crossed the mountain. On a very big plain, there were about 50-60 tents. They were Khambas and nomads, and all kinds of people.

Q: Were those people prisoners?

A: No, they were just camping there. They didn't know that we were coming. They had yaks and sheep.

Q: Were you on horseback?

A: Yes, we had horses. The Khamba prisoners were walking. So we were also leading our horses and walking with the Khambas. It was just before sunset when we saw the tents.

Q: Were those yak hair tents?

A: Yes. The plain was very big so it looked like the tents were quite near, but they were very far away. We had a staff officer [Ch. can mou] in our regiment. We left the prisoners and one soldier who was from Gyantse to keep watch on the prisoners. The staff officer was riding a horse and we were walking. When we approached the tents, they [the Khambas] were shooting from the tents. The staff officer's horse was shot dead. After that, the officer was shot on his right and left hands, and his stomach and just above his head on his cap. Altogether, he was hit with 4 bullets. They [the Khambas] must be quite smart for they knew that he was an officer because he was riding a horse, so they targeted him. They were also shooting at us, but we were hiding behind sand mounds and we were shooting our guns. After a while, they were not shooting at us.

When we came near the tents it had become dark, so then we cut all the tent guylines so the tents fell on the people. Then we stabbed the tents with bayonets on all of the lumps, thinking there might be people in the tents. There was a soldier called Chime Tsering [Tib. 'chi med tshe ring] who was from Norbu Khyuntse. He stabbed his bayonet on a lump, which made a sound "Wo" so he stabbed it again. It was still making the same sound. After we opened up the tent, we saw that it was a small calf. In the tent, only an old man and two women were killed. The other people had fled.

We slept at a place [a] little bit far away from the tent. After that a soldier called Gyalpo [Tib. rgyal po] and I were told to find the prisoners and the soldier. When we arrived there, we saw that the soldier had been killed and the prisoners had taken all the horses and fled. Probably, the soldier was looking at us where we were fighting. He was stabbed in the back of his neck. We had bullets on the horses and those were all taken away.

Q: How many horses did you have?

A: We had 10 horses. They took the horses, the soldier's gun and the bullets on the horses. Then we carried his corpse [answer not finished].

Q: Did you have radios to communicate between the troops?

A: We had a wireless, but each squad didn't have that. It was only in the gyashog.

Q: In your gyashog, how many Chinese and how many Tibetans were there?

A: In each gyashog there were about 10 Tibetans. In the gyashog there were about 125 Chinese. In each gyashog there were 9 squads. There were three squads in one platoon.

Q: Did the staff of officer die?

A: He was injured, so his right hand was tied in a sling on his neck. His left hand was not injured seriously. It was just like a scratch. After we arrived at the gyashog, they sent a wireless message to the other regiments saying that they [the Khambas] had fled, taking the horses. They told them to search for them. I heard that another regiment was able to seize them. There were three companies [Ch. tuan] in that area.

Q: When you saw those Khambas, what did you think about them?

A: At first I heard that the Khambas had protective talismen and swords. Therefore, I was afraid that they could not be killed because of the protective talismen. And since we didn't have protective talismen, we would get shot. I thought they would kill a lot of people. But actually it was not like that.

Q: Were those Khambas scary?

A: Yes. They were carrying very big amulet boxes for keeping the religious objects.

Q: Were the Chinese soldiers afraid of the Khambas?

A: They were not afraid of the Khambas because they had made war with them in the past.

Q: When the Khambas went to the nomad's area, did you hear about the Khambas robbing things from the nomads? Did you think they were bad?

A: They robbed herds of yaks and flocks of sheep. Before that, at the backside of the mountain pass, there were many nomads who belonged to the Branch Military Headquarters [Ch. fen qu] in Shigatse. Those cattle were taken from the Khamba bandits. Some of the cattle were given to the misers and some cattle were brought back. The next day, we piled up the things and took some nomads skin gowns to be used for our bedding. And we went to Menthong [Tib. sman mthong] Monastery.

Q: To which county did that monastery belong?

A: It belong to Saga County. At that time, it was snowing very heavily so we had a horse for each soldier and one horse to be used for loading the pots and pans of the squad. We hung a long cotton bag full of rice and flour on the horse. We Tibetans didn't have much problem, because we were eating meat and dried cheese from the nomads. But the Chinese were suspicious of the food being poisoned. The Chinese were telling us, "You guys are bad, there is poison in the food." We would tell them, "How could they get the time to put poison in the food. They were afraid of not being able to flee."

Q: What month was that?

A: That was the 3-4th Tibetan month in the year 1960. It was very cold up there.

Q: Did some Chinese die because of the climate?

A: On the battlefield, not even a single Chinese soldier was killed. They [Khambas] were fighting a little bit and running away, so sometimes we couldn't catch them. Our food was taken away by the prisoners, so we divided the food we had in the gyashog. It was snowing and our food and fodder ran out. So many horses died. After that, the soldiers had to boil and eat horse meat so they didn't die from starvation. We were very hungry for about a week.

Q: Did you eat horse meat?

A: At the beginning, we, the Tibetans, said that we were not going to eat horse meat. They said, "If you don't eat horse meat, you will die because we don't have any other things to eat." Later we were so hungry that we had to eat horse meat due to the desperate situation. At that point, we thought it would be better to eat horse meat than die from starvation.

There was a soldier called Dorje who was from Lhodrag [Tib. lho brag]. He said, "I am not eating horse meat even if I die." When we came to the top of the mountain, his mouth became dry and he asked me, "Thöndrub, how tasty is the horse meat? I told him, "It is delicious. But regardless of whether it was delicious or not, we didn't have any choice but to eat it because we were hungry." Then he said, "Do you have some with you?" I said, "Yes, are you going to eat it?" He said, "Yes, now I have no choice but to eat it." I gave him some horse meat and he ate it.

After that, we met some nomads and they gave us some dried cheese. They said, "Oh too bad! You are really hungry." Then we loaded our things on their yaks and we were brought to Saga County. There were vehicles in the county and they had rice, flour and pork tins. We hadn't had good food for a while so we ate too much and all of us had diarrhea.

Q: Did they educate you in the regiment?

A: When we were making war, they were telling us, "You should sacrifice your life if it is necessary. If it is not necessary to sacrifice your life, you should try your best to defeat the enemy and defend oneself." They were giving only military instructions. Otherwise, they didn't give other instructions. After that we were sent to Yanchö Tengkar and stayed there for a month.

Q: What did you do in Yanchö Tengkar?

A: We were just resting and asking the misers about where the Khambas were.

Q: Could you speak Chinese at that point?

A: Yes, I could speak everyday language and the language used for military training, but I couldn't translate the important words regarding policy.

After that, we heard that there were Khambas in Dzonga [Tib. rdzong dga'], so we went to that place, but the Khambas had already fled. We heard that they were behind the mountain pass and we had to travel one day to get there. At that point, the Khambas were going in small groups to many different places, so our squad was sent to that place. When we arrived at that place, we saw a very big nomadic area. We thought it was the Khambas, and all the soldiers surrounded the nomads. We were ready to fire, but at that point some people came out from the tent. We shouted, "If you surrender, the policy of the Communist Party is correct and there would be no problem for you. If you don't surrender, we are going to shoot you." They were shouting, "We are nomads." When we went inside the tent, they said that the Khambas were behind this mountain pass.

After we got on the mountain pass, we saw a man was coming from the corner of the mountain range. When he saw us, he started to go back. At that point, the soldier called Gyalpo shot that man. For that, he was criticized by the squad leader, saying that he caused a disturbance so the enemy would run away. When we went down there, there were 5 tents with yaks and sheep, but all of the people had already fled.

Q: If that soldier didn't shoot, you probably could have seized them, right?

A: That person saw us, so they might have fled. There was snow on the top of the mountain, and there were rocks in between and a meadow at the bottom. Those people were probably hiding in the rocky area, but we couldn't see them. Just before it became dark, they came down one by one. Then we shot guns at the rocky area just guessing those people were there. The soldier who fired the machine gun was dead.

After it became dark, two women were coming down and the soldier who was from Norbu Khyuntse shot and killed them. Then we came down and loaded all of the useful stuff on the yaks and burned the useless stuff.

Q: There were only two women?

A: The other people might be among the rocky area, but if we went up there, they would have killed us.

Q: So you left the other people and came down, right?

A: Yes. After that, it was said that a group of Khambas would be coming to a place located far away to the south of Saga, near to the Nepalese border. We were told to stay there for a week and the Khambas would come to that mountain pass.